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ABSTRACT

Contrary to common wisdom, the authorities of Colonial Mexico (1521-1600) were vitally concerned with the teaching of reading to the indigenous people. Alphabetic literacy was introduced in Mexico with the coming of the Franciscan friars, who brought with them many innovations and heartily set about the task of education. Some of the friars' innovations included using the Indians' hieroglyphic picture writing and transcribing the Nahuatl language into Roman letters. Fray Pedro de Gante wrote a trilingual primer (published in 1569) and thus pioneered the use of vernacular language in education. The teaching and learning of reading and writing seems to have flourished under these conditions. Later, the teaching of literacy became fossilized in an unchanging text that was used almost exclusively, with only minor changes, for two centuries. Literacy always had a definite purpose in Mexico--to perpetuate the system of government in power and to convert the native population to Catholicism. The decline of education in Mexico can be accounted for by opposition from Spanish colonists to education of the indigenous population, and to the cutting off of adequate funding for education. (Four figures are included and 38 references are attached.) (SR)

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Technical Report No. 494

THE HISTORY OF READING AND THE USES OF LITERACY IN COLONIAL MEXICO

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Abstract

Contrary to common wisdom, the authorities of Colonial Mexico (1521-1600) were vitally concerned with the teaching of reading. Historical sources document that a dedicated group of renaissance-imbued professional educators used an intriguing combination of methods and materials, including a trilingual primer and a catechism written in "hieroglyphics" or pictographic script, to introduce Mexicans to reading and the uses of literacy.

THE HISTORY OF READING AND THE USES OF LITERACY IN COLONIAL MEXICO

Throughout history, new systems of writing, often accompanied by foreign languages, have been imposed on unwilling and technologically less advanced societies. In Mexico, the invasion of alphabetic literacy closely followed the Spanish conquest. When the military conquest of Mexico was complete, a spiritual battle for the soul of the Indian race was begun. This battle was spearheaded by Franciscan and other friars who believed that the teaching of literacy would facilitate their task of converting the native populations to Catholicism.

The arrival of Hernán Cortés and his troops in Mexico in 1519 and his later meeting with the Aztecs and their emperor, Moctezuma, brought two radically different cultures into conflict. The Spanish nation, as represented by the conquistadors, was fully convinced that it had the right, indeed the duty, to incorporate as many foreign peoples as possible into its empire. The tensions created by the subjugation of the Mesoamerican groups were not completely resolved by the conquest of the capital of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlán, in 1521. Instead, the two groups, Spanish and indigenous, were to begin a long process that would eventually result in the creation of the Mexican people. During the period of Spanish domination, a great deal of effort was made to "civilize" and "convert" the natives of the newly conquered territory. The mendicant orders of the Catholic Church, and especially the Franciscans, felt that the diffusion of knowledge of their language and its written conventions were crucial aspects of their colonial expansion. It was believed that in the absence of such knowledge, the process of conversion would not proceed as smoothly or as quickly as desired. The governmental bureaucracy also found it expedient to see to it that literacy was fostered. The manner in which literacy, and especially reading, was taught in Mexico during the early colonial period (1521-1600) is the subject of this report.

While every effort has been made to consult primary sources for information, this was not always possible. Unfortunately, while some of the documents that are of interest are available, most are not. The writings of early Colonial Mexican historians (Mendieta, 1945; Motolinia, 1951) have been carefully scrutinized for evidence of educational activity in general, and of literacy instruction in particular, in an attempt to paint as complete a picture as possible of the history of reading in New Spain. Whenever possible, the actual materials that were used to teach reading and writing have been obtained and examined. Many of these documents, such as Gante's primer, picture catechism, and the catechism written in the Nahuatl language using Roman script (Bravo Ahuja, 1977; Martínez & Rodiles, 1977; Navarro, 1970; Valtón, 1947) have been copied and reproduced by modern authors. Others, such as Valadés' alphabet (1579) were available in their original form. Other original documents were available in collections compiled by later authors such as García Icazbalceta (1886, 1971) who produced several such works. In any event, complete documentation of the type that comprises true historical research was lacking, either because it was simply not obtainable or because it was unknown to this author. If this work had been intended for historians its influence would have been slight. However, this report was written for educators, especially those interested in multicultural instruction. It is hoped that a better understanding of the roots of bilingual/biliterate instruction will contribute to a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of current instructional practices that employ more than one language or one script.

Spain's Educational Policy in the New World

It is commonly believed that Spain did not emphasize education as much, as for example, England in the establishment of her colonies. This belief is only partially true, as this paper will attempt to demonstrate. Spanish colonial policy is often viewed negatively. Spain has had defenders in the area of education, however. Several authors have challenged the idea that Spain was not concerned with education.

Zepeda Rincón (1933), a Mexican educational historian, asserted that:

> One of the centuries greatly slandered because of the ignorance and malice of those who twist history and repeat falsehoods, has been that in which our culture began to be shaped [the 16th century]. (p. 29)

An important bibliographer and historian of Mexico, García Icazbalceta (1896), believed that Spain's educational efforts during the 16th century were not fully recognized or made widely known, while Steck (1943), an American religious historian, opined that the (Spanish) authorities were uniquely generous concerning the field of public education. The opinions of these writers from a time after the colonial period do not, of course, decisively demonstrate what the educational policies of New Spain were during the 16th century. They do, however, portray a viewpoint that is strikingly different from that which is commonly held, especially here in the U.S. If Spain's policies were aimed at depriving the inhabitants of New Spain of literacy, then historical records of such abuse should confirm this neglect. If, on the other hand, efforts were made on behalf of popular education and literacy then records of this activity should be in existence.

Education and Literacy in Pre-Cortesian Mexico

An understanding of how education and literacy were viewed and utilized in pre-Cortesian Mexico is useful in understanding their development during the colonial period. It is important to recognize that while the writing system employed by the Indians did not employ a phonetic alphabet, it was capable of representing most everything that was important to the Mesoamerican peoples (Ruz Lhuillier, 1946).

Writing was taught to the children of the nobility and a few exceptional commoners in the educational institution known as the "Calmécac" (Kobayashi, 1974; Gómez Canedo, 1982). Children of the commoners were usually educated in more practical matters in schools called "telpochcalli" (Moreno, 1962).

The office of scribe was highly respected by the ancient Mexicans. The scribe's title was "tlacuilo" and it was his job to record those things deemed important by the ruling elite as well as to interpret the scrolls or codices that had already been written (Ruz Lhuillier, 1946). The "reading" of the codices appears to have been a highly elaborated ritual. An unknown Aztec reader has left witness to this process:

> I sing the pictures of the book
> as I unfold [its pages]
> I am like the colorful parrot
> as I make the codice's pages speak
> inside the house of the picture-writings.
> (Bravo Ahuja, 1977, p. 29)

The use of singing to "read" the codices may signal that many of the texts were used for religious purposes and thus memorized, with the books serving as an aid to memory. Early testimony as to the difficulty of reading the codices is noted by Ross (*Codex Mendoza*, 1984), who recorded the excuse given by a Spanish scribe. He attributed the inadequacies of his writing style--found in his commentary and explanatory notes on the *Codex Mendoza*, an Aztec manuscript--to the problems involved in "reading" the Aztec writing. His excuse was that the Aztecs took so long to agree among themselves on the meaning of the manuscript that he, the scribe, was only left with 10 days in which to complete his work.

In the *Codex Mendoza*, different uses and several important characteristics of the Aztec's writing can be observed. The system was used to record the history, treaties, life styles, professional codes, religious beliefs, science, civil rights, the criminal code, and what were considered by the Aztecs to be good manners. In fact, just about all of the knowledge that was necessary for the functioning of the nation was kept in some sort of written form (Ruz Lhuillier, 1946).

While several of the glyphs used in the Aztec system are self-explanatory, others are not. For instance, names and place names had their own readily recognized symbols. Prepositions, verbs, and some nouns are at times represented by the picture of some object that sounds similar to the desired word. This use of rebus-like figures was the beginning of a recognition of the phonetic principle in the Aztec writings. These same interesting features of written language resurfaced later in the work of the Spanish friars.

The First Reading Teachers in Mexico

The first three Franciscan friars arrived in Mexico in 1523, just two years after the conquest. These three friars were Flemish. In 1524, 12 Franciscans arrived after having been commissioned by the Pope. The first Dominicans came in 1526, and thereafter there were new arrivals from Spain annually. Sometimes large groups would arrive at a time (Steck, 1943). At least some of these men were very well educated by standards of that day. García Icazbalceta (1896) has highlighted their accomplishments:

> The fathers were not vulgar men but rather had sufficient culture and education, several had distinguished themselves in university chairs and prelacies: some were even of noble birth. What proud doctor or decorated academic would today accept a position in a primary school in some obscure village? (p. 166)

These men undertook their task with great missionary zeal. García Icazbalceta describes the job they were given as one of "converting and civilizing that great mass of uncultured people in one day. They were 12 men for millions of children and adults" (i.e., the 12 Franciscan friars commissioned by the Pope). The result of all this activity and work was the construction of a large number of churches and schools. There are no exact figures available as to the number of schools built, but Mendieta, the friar who wrote the comprehensive work *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana* (1596/1945) during the colonial period, noted that "a school has been built in all the towns." He added that in these schools the children were taught to read, and were also taught Christian doctrine. Steck (1943) claimed there was a school in all areas where the religious resided. He quoted a report from Guadalajara that stated: "In each friary there is a teacher who instructs in reading and writing, in singing, and in the playing of musical instruments all those boys who desire to be instructed."

Henry Bamford Parkes (1969), the writer of a well-known text of Mexican history, summarized the educational development of the colonial period in this way:

> The leading officials of New Spain devoted themselves vigorously to the development of education. The friars taught the Indians reading and writing and Christian doctrine. . . The Indians at Tlatelolco learnt Latin and Theology, and they made such rapid progress that within 10 years their teachers were able to turn the college over to the Indian Alumni. There was a time when pure blooded Indians were to be found teaching Latin to the sons of Spaniards. (p. 92)

Mendieta (1945/1596) and Motolinia (1951/1536-1541) record an amusing incident in which a Spanish priest, not believing that Indians could learn much of value, began questioning a few Indians as to their knowledge of the Our Father, Creed, etc. in Latin. The priest chose to speak to an Indian who happened to be a graduate of one of the friar's secondary schools. This particular Indian was fluent in Latin and so he recited whatever the priest asked him. The priest, still not convinced, pointed out what he thought was a mistake in the recitation of a prayer. The supposed mistake was that the Indian has said "Nato" instead of "Natus" in the Creed (use of the wrong case in Latin). Upon hearing this objection from the priest the Indian asked him, "Reverende, pater, nato, cujus casus est?" (Reverend Father, nato, which case is it?) Hearing this response from the Indian, Mendieta (p. 69, 70 v. 3), wrote that the priest had to leave confused and offended because, he, the priest, did not know much Latin at all himself and consequently could not understand the Indian's question.

Fray Pedro de Gante

Of those who were involved in the activity of teaching there is one figure who clearly stood out from the rest and who deserves the title of "the founder of education in the New World." That person was Fray Pedro de Gante (Zepeda Rincón, 1933). Gante was a Flemish friar who arrived in Mexico in 1523 and was born around 1479 or 1480 (the Low Countries were then a part of the Spanish Empire). He spent nearly 50 years working with and teaching the Indians (García Icazbalceta, 1886). Because he may have been related to royalty, Emperor Charles V of Spain, he probably received the best education available at that time. He is said to have stuttered so badly that the Spaniards could not understand him but somehow the Indians could (Chávez, 1943).

Arriving in Mexico just two years after the conquest, Gante settled in Texcoco and there founded a school. He spent three years in Texcoco and then set up his famous school, San José de los Naturales

in Mexico City. The school had an enrollment of as many as 1,000 children at a time. García Icazbalceta wrote that during the morning the children were taught reading, writing, and singing, and in the afternoons, Christian doctrine, but that Gante's chief occupation was always teaching children. Of course, Gante needed to know the Indian's language, and he appeared to have mastered Nahuatl, the language of central Mexico (Chávez, 1936; García Icazbalceta, 1896; Mendieta, 1945).

Not only did Gante master the Indian's language, he seemed to have been a pretty astute judge of human character as well. Sánchez (1944), a Mexican-American educator, felt that Gante initiated progressive teaching methods that included the use of homogeneous ability grouping and the notion that instruction should match the needs of the pupils. Sánchez also felt that Gante could be considered as comparable to the famous Moravian bishop, Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670), considered by many to be the first modern educator. Gante is said to have taught children like children, adolescents like adolescents, and adults like adults. Sánchez (1944) viewed the most striking feature of Gante's program as the sound conception he had of the psychology of teaching and learning and his insight into the process of acculturation.

Various Scripts Used to Teach Reading

Picture Writing

Gante's insight must have led him to the use not only of the native language of the Indians but also to the full implementation of the Indian's system of picture writing (see Figure 1). He is said to have learned this skill while learning Nahuatl in Texcoco from the Indian nobles who resided there. Nahuatl was the language used by most of the Indians living on the Mexican plateau and as a lingua franca by many other groups (Heath, 1972). After learning Nahuatl, Gante produced a fascinating little book called *Catecismo de la Doctrina Cristiana* around 1553 (Sentenach, 1900; facsimile reproduction in Navarro, 1970. Dates are only approximate and reflect materials that have been preserved. It is not certain whether earlier versions of particular documents were published as is implied by the title of Gante's Cartilla, for example, i.e., "nuevamente enmendada" or newly amended.)

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

While the subject matter of the Catechism was no novelty for Gante's day, the script used to transcribe it certainly was. The Catechism was written using the picture writing, or "hieroglyphics" of the Aztecs. This picture writing, created in some ways by Gante and the other friars, borrows from the concepts and figures used by the Aztecs but, as will become apparent later on in this report, modified them so that they were able to be employed by the friars. Gante received help from others in the elaboration of the picture writings as this next citation points out.

> In the primitive school of San Francisco of Mexico, it is also just to remember alongside of the educational accomplishments of friar Pedro de Gante, the ingenious initiative of one friar Jacobo de Testera--another son of France, who in order to teach his students the essentials of literacy and Christian doctrine, along with the prayers, went to the hieroglyphic signs and figures that the natives had used beforehand; and this system of teaching continued in practice, not only among the Franciscan apostles, but also, later among the Jesuit missionaries, until the seventeenth century. (Valtón, 1947, p. 59)

It is interesting to note that many aspects of the Indians' former educational systems were evident in the friars' schools. The same texts that the friars had their students memorize were also taught to the children as songs (Mendieta, 1596/1945). The texts that were sung (e.g., prayers, the Our Father, Ave Maria, and Ten Commandments, etc.) were the same texts that the children were later introduced to in print. The friars may have been aware of the tremendous aid that such specific prior knowledge gave their students in learning how to read and comprehend the materials they used.

The key to the understanding of Gante's system of writing is that it was looser and more open to interpretation than a phonetic system. The reader of such texts was not as strictly bound to the page as are readers of alphabetic languages. Many potential reading problems, such as a reader widely diverging from the author's original intentions, were probably avoided by having the students memorize the texts before they read them. Memorization of the text allowed for very predictable reading. It is

possible that memorizing the simple texts speeded the pupils' learning similar to the manner in which children today are aided in reading when a story is read over and over to them until they associate the written page with the story.

The friars developed their particular uses for picture writing by observing their newfound parishioners. Mendieta described how the Indians used their writing system to convey messages:

> Others sought another way, to my way of thinking more difficult, although interesting, and it was to use the words which in their language were similar in pronunciation to Latin words, and they put them on paper in order, not the words but the meanings of them, because they don't use letters, and that is now they understood by characters. We will give some examples of this. The word that they have that is closest in pronunciation to "Pater" (Father in Latin) is pantli, and this means something like a little flag and they also use this to symbolize the number 20. So in order to remember Pater, they put the little flag that means pantli, and then they say pater. For noster, the closest word that they have is nochtli, which is the name for what the Spaniards here call a tuna and in Spain they call a fig of the Indies (prickly pear), a fruit that is covered with a green peel and is covered by needles, very painful for whoever grabs the fruit. So then, in order to remember the word noster they draw after the little flag, a prickly pear, which they call nochtli, and in this way they continue until they finish their prayer. And some, who don't rely on their memory for confession, use the same thing in order to remember their sins, carrying them drawn in their characters. (Mendieta, 1945, p. 92)

These notes of Mendieta's are vivid examples of the uses that writing was put to by the Indians, as well as the versatility the system possessed. It would have been similar to writing the sentence, "I saw the sun" by drawing a picture of an eye, a saw, and a sun. The mnemonic device of using similar sounding words to represent other words was commonly employed by the Aztec scribes or tlacuilos. Such a system was picked up on by Gante and other friars as the basis for their picture catechisms and other documents. The effects that this usage had on learning to read alphabetic script may have been profound. The success of the friars' literacy programs are spoken of as nothing less than remarkable (Heath, 1972). Of course, the successful learning of the students, as well as the fruitful teaching of the friars, was firmly rooted in the traditions of prehispanic literacy and would probably have been achieved with a great deal more difficulty had the different groups of Mexico not possessed their own system of literacy (Kobayashi, 1974).

The Aztecs did not always arrange their writings in a rigid left-right directional manner, but Gante did. Gante also needed to create a number of new symbols to communicate the mysteries of Christianity to the natives. Many of these were not easy concepts to convey, as for example, the idea of the Christian Trinity. Sentenach (1900) described the system like this:

> the composer of the catechisms tried to accommodate himself as much as possible to the graphic traditions that he found in practice among the conquered peoples. The system that is today called rebus, more or less perfect, was employed, indicating the persons and things by the most abbreviated possible representations, and the actions and relational particles by more or less conventional signs. But all of this was not subject to a rigid pattern, but rather moving forward, as it were, as best as possible, and leaving certain difficulties of diction to the help of a text that was known by memory. (p. 604)

Gante seems to have used hieroglyphic writing as a bridge to using the phonetic Roman alphabet. Because the subject matter would have been familiar to the Indians, they may have been able to master the concept of reading quickly. The catechism and all of its components were taught so as to be memorized. This may have been the quickest route to learning the phonetic alphabet (Chávez, 1936). Steck (1943) alleged that everyone had to learn the catechism first, and that next in order of importance was reading and writing. García Icazbalceta (1896) wrote that the use of the picture writing was so popular that the friars used it in teaching all during the 16th century and partly into the 17th century as well.

Some intermediary forms where the hieroglyphics were mixed with Roman letters and where the pictures were modified to fit a new usage have been found and are still in existence. An example of this mixed writing can be seen in the *Codice Osuna*, a 16th century manuscript reproduced by the Indigenous Institute of Mexico in 1947 (see Figure 2). The mixed writing, composed about 1565 (Sentenach, 1900),

was written in Spanish and Nahuatl in Roman letters and also in the hieroglyphic writing of the Aztecs. The message appears to be a formal complaint written by the "indigenous officials and rulers of Mexico City against the viceroy and oidores to the Visitador General de la Nueva España." The complaint is overpayment exacted for bells. It seems that the Indians of the city were forced into labor to pay for the bells, and that this forced labor had gone on for at least two years.

[Insert Figure 2 about here.]

Alphabetic Script

After adapting and employing the hieroglyphic writing, it appears that Gante and the other friars masterminded the transcription of Nahuatl in Roman characters. Examples of this transcription of Nahuatl and other Indian languages can be seen in Icazbalceta's *Bibliografía Mexicana del Siglo XVI* (1886). The impression such an accomplishment would have made on those of the elite Indian classes who could read picture writing can easily be imagined. Quite possibly, they would have quickly recognized its advantages and also been eager to learn and use it (Bravo Ahuja, 1977). Abundant testimony of the Indians' ability to write using the Roman script was produced shortly after the conquest (Anderson, 1946).

Gante penned his *Doctrina Christiana en lengua mexicana*, or Christian Doctrine in the Mexican language, in 1547 (Mártinez & Rodiles, 1977). This book is an entire account written in Nahuatl using Roman letters. It contains some small illustrations and a copy of the Roman alphabet, probably because of a belief in, and use of, the spelling method of teaching reading. This method, also used in the North American Colonies, stressed knowledge of the names of the letters of the alphabet. After students could correctly identify all of the letters of a given word, they were somehow expected to pronounce it. A great deal of syllable pronunciation drill also accompanied this method.

In 1569, Gante's primer, *Cartilla Para Enseñar A Leer*, or primer for teaching reading, was published (see Figure 3). The primer was 16 pages long and contained the alphabet, the most common Roman Catholic prayers, and some numbers. Gante included in the primer three different languages, Spanish (which he calls Romance), Latin, and Nahuatl written in Roman letters. The use of three different languages may have been influenced by Gante's Flemish background, because the use of vernacular languages was pioneered in the Low Countries (Sánchez, 1944). The spelling method was most likely used to teach the contents of the Cartilla. Page 2 of the Cartilla is a list of syllables needed for the reading of Spanish and adapted to the use of Nahuatl. The skeletal framework of the cartilla led Bravo Ahuja (1977), a modern Mexican educational historian, to speculate that using it to teach reading would have had to incline the teachers and students to be very resourceful, something that will become increasingly apparent later in this report as the written records are examined in more detail.

[Insert Figure 3 about here.]

Some form of Gante's Cartilla was used throughout the period of the Spanish presence in Mexico. Andrade (1899) cited a *Cartilla Mayor en Lengua Castellana, Latina y Mexicana Nuevamente Corregida, y Enmendada y Reformada* in 1700. In 1815 a teacher, Igancio Montero, complained that the schools were still using a Cartilla published in 1542 (Tanck Estrada, 1977). This particular cartilla was probably that of Fray Molina and was very similar to Gante's (Ricard, 1966; Valtón, 1935).

Methods and Materials for the Teaching of Reading

Different bits and pieces of information concerning the methods and materials for the teaching of reading in Colonial Mexico have survived. Motolinia (1951), who like Mendieta was another Franciscan friar, wrote that even the Indians who have just started to learn to read can read well, and that they also write to each other in their own language. The friars and other Europeans were amazed at how many Indians became literate in the three languages, Latin, Spanish, and Nahuatl. Requests were made for additional books, and this suggests that the friars recognized the importance of providing the students with large quantities of reading materials. Certain friars owned their own substantial libraries, which were occasionally later donated to the schools (Mathes, 1982). The friars themselves wrote a great deal of books and materials, both for use in training future missionaries and for the Indians themselves (Heath, 1972).

The novelty of alphabetic print may have been a strong factor in getting people to learn how to read (Steck, 1943). If the reports about how the Indians learned to read quickly can be believed, a possible conclusion is that the astonishment the friars felt may have occurred because reading was considered a very difficult task or an extremely uncommon activity for the average European of that day. On the other hand, they may simply have been amazed that Indians could learn to read at all. Most of the early reports, however, agree that there were many Indians who could and did learn how to read (Anderson, 1946). A more current Mexican historian, Gómez Canedo (1982), emphasized the magnitude of the task that the friars undertook. He found it difficult to understand how they were able to teach the Indians to read and write at all. The sparse nature of the written record left to modern readers necessitates some reconstruction of events pertaining to how students learned to read and write (Bravo Ahuja, 1977).

Ricard (1966) has brought to light some fascinating materials that were used by the Spanish teachers in Colonial Mexico. He recognized that the letters of the alphabet would have been quite abstract to the Indians and their children, and also, that this abstractness may have led the friars to devise picture alphabets for their students to refer to. It has already been pointed out how the ancient writing of the Indians was in many respects a series of memory aids for use in remembering different mundane things, as well as remembering the foreign words used in prayers and religious materials.

The pictures used by the friars can be seen in a book written by Valadés (1579) (see Figure 4). Here the letter A is represented by a double ladder and compass, B by a pair of andirons and a zither, and C by a horseshoe. The imagination must be stretched a little in order to associate some of the letters with the objects chosen. For instance, the letter F is represented by a dagger, with the hilt serving as the top part of the letter. A column, a fish, and a tower all served to conjure up the letter I in the minds of pupils, while an L is shown as a scythe and an ax, with their handles up and heads down. The letter V demonstrates that the friars were not entirely without humor. It is pictured as a fat man holding his rear end as his two legs rise to resemble the familiar figure.

[Insert Figure 4 about here.]

Ricard believed that the children may have played with the actual objects or their pictures in a way similar to the way children play with alphabet blocks today. Gómez Canedo described an 18th century friar from Lima, who, similar to the 16th century friars in Mexico, gave his students the letters of the alphabet stamped on blocks of wood, as well as actual words. Of course, it is difficult to know just how widespread such practices may have been in colonial times. The fact that these materials did exist, however, and can be seen and examined today, provides reason to believe that these were not isolated cases of innovation.

In addition to the pictures of objects that served to remind students of the letters' visual forms, pictures were used whose names began with the sound of the letter that was being taught, such as in English we might say "B is for boy" and then proceed to show the child the letter accompanied by its corresponding picture. These pictures include some distinctly Mexican images, such as a man and woman in Indian garb, and different animals indigenous to the Americas. The pictures are individually framed on a page divided into 21 equal squares. Today, a teacher would probably photocopy the page and have the children cut out the pictures and paste them to cardboard. In colonial times, it is possible that the children would have copied the pictures themselves for later use, especially because we know that the children of the elite classes were quite adept at drawing, this having been an important part of the curriculum in the calmécac.

The exact method used to teach reading, as has already been noted, was most probably a spelling method. This would not have been the only tool for teaching literacy, however. We know the friars felt that their pupils learned very rapidly. Motolinia (1951) described how the Indians learned to write simply by being shown the different types of letters used.

> Writing was learned easily by them because in the few days [that they are taught] they later redo the assignment that their teachers give to them, and if the teacher changes the style of writing, which is a very common thing that different men write differently, then they also change the lettering and write in the manner which their teacher shows to them. (p. 295)

In reference to Motolinia's quote about the aptitude of the pupils in learning to write, Bravo Ahuja (1977) remarked that records like this would lead one to believe that only the mechanics of reading and

writing were being learned. She quoted one ancient witness to the effect that the students were just like parrots as they rote memorized their lessons. There can be little doubt that memorization of material played an important part in both Spanish and Aztec education (Castañeda, 1984). It has already been pointed out that the majority of texts would have been memorized before they were seen in print and that they were also sung as well. In commenting on the same material written by Motolinia, Gómez Canedo (1982) agreed that some of the learning was indeed mindless, characteristic of the times, but he added that several of the Indians quickly went beyond such learning to write histories and other important works (Anderson, 1946).

The friars are described as having taught with "missionary zeal" (García Icazbalceta, 1896). The secular teachers who came later were probably not as committed to teaching as the friars before them had been. Teaching, and specifically the teaching of reading in Mexico, are described in later years by contemporary writers. Larroyo (1973), an educational historian, recounted the teaching and learning of reading like this:

> The learning of this subject was practiced in conformity with the antiquated syllabaries . . . Always letter by letter, and then forgetting the names of these when combining them in syllables without meaning, that later formed unconnected words, . . . and the writing disassociated from reading. (p. 256)

Barbosa Heldt (1971) described the Silabario de San Miguel, based on the spelling method and on the syllabaries and cartillas of centuries before, as a remnant of the past, a document of the traditional and antiscientific pedagogy. One author recited in detail how reading was taught in the 19th century using a syllabary.

> The type of teaching that was followed in the "Amiga" (a type of kindergarten) was individual, of current usage during this period and the method was absolutely synthetic, starting with the knowledge of the letters, and then syllables, words and sentences. One by one the children were called before the teacher, beginning with those most behind who according to their turn would place the syllabary of the Jesus Child on the teacher's lap, and as the characters were named, she would point them out with a pointer of straw or twisted glass that she kept in her hem, not sharp, a little black figure, and that is how the lesson was given, saying: Jesus and the cross and that which follows is the A (Jesús y cruz y la que sigue es la A) alluding to the print that preceded the vowels, and later they pointed to and pronounced these, or rather the consonants that made up the next page. After the spelling, syllable and word exercises followed and that is how the child arrived successively to finish the monotonous studies of the syllabary. This was the happiest moment in the life of the child, as if the moment had arrived in which for the first time he would receive the prize for his efforts. (García Cubas, 1950, p. 255)

It would be as difficult to conceive of early Hispanic education without the use of cartillas as it would early English and American education without hornbooks or battledores. The cartillas were a part of the very baggage the friars brought with them from Europe and can be found very early in use in Cuba and Hispaniola (Gómez Canedo, 1982). The importance memory played when using a cartilla to learn to read, and the manner in which children would have been taught has been described by Castañeda (1984). The names of the letters would first have to be mastered, then the combinations of letters to form syllables, and then they would have moved on to the syllabaries where they would continue practicing syllables and words divided into syllables. Once the children had mastered all of this, they would move on to read short phrases in a primer (catón).

The use of cartillas to teach reading was universal until the 19th century, and even today continues in use in some of the rural areas of Mexico (Barbosa Heldt, 1971). The word "cartilla" is translated as "children's primer or spelling book" by *Cassell's Spanish/English Dictionary* (Gooch & García de Paredes, 1978). The *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* defines cartilla as "A small little folder, printed, that contains the letters of the alphabet and the beginning rudiments necessary to begin reading." Wagner (1946) described the cartillas in the following manner:

> In reality, the term cartilla does not refer to the contents, but is rather the name given to what we call a small folder of two folded pages, or rather two sheets of paper folded in order to form 8 or 16 pages, according to the size of these. But then, as now, the word cartilla, was that

> commonly used to designate a publication that did not exceed 16 pages, criteria which appear to still be in use. (p. 245)

Wagner's definition, however, was amended by Valtón (1935), another educational historian, who wrote that the books always had a pedagogical character, and also that their content had to do primarily with the beginning essentials of literacy and Christian doctrine. The dictionary definition describes the contents of a cartilla as the beginning essentials of reading. These essentials generally included the alphabet; lists of syllables; at times, lists of words; and perhaps some prayers or other religious material. The use of cartillas to teach reading has been condemned by some as "the most blatant symbol of the monotony of primary education" (Tanck Estrada, 1977). Of course, much of the condemnation is in connection with the method used to teach the cartillas, that is, the spelling method.

Even though the cartillas were taught in conjunction with the spelling method, and even though this method has received almost universal disapproval, it was, in fact, the method used to teach millions of Mexicans, Spaniards and Hispanic-Americans how to read in the parochial and religious schools (Barbosa Heldt, 1971). In early colonial times, the lack of large numbers of printed materials may have confined the use of the cartilla to the teacher alone, who would have taught his pupils its contents.

Uses of Literacy in Colonial Mexico

Up to this point, an attempt has been made to document as fully as possible the efforts that were made to teach literacy to the inhabitants of Colonial Mexico. The conquest of Mexico brought about myriad changes in the way people lived. Literacy and its uses, while not entirely unknown in pre-Columbian times, were advanced by a quantum leap with the arrival of the friars in New Spain after 1523. The advancement was primarily in terms of dependence on the written word, whereas formerly oral communication supplemented by the picture writing of the different peoples of Mesoamerica was used.

But the literacy that the Spanish conquistadors brought to Mexico did not exist in a vacuum. The type of literacy that the Spaniards developed in Mexico was increasingly confined to fewer and fewer elite groups. Prior indigenous rule over the area can be likened to a pyramid. In some respects the Spaniards simply toppled the upper pinnacle and occupied that position themselves. The Spaniards utilized the Indian forms of hierarchical rule and adapted the Indian governmental structures so as to fit the Spanish system. The Spanish monarchy was not a totally foreign concept to the Indians.

The new Spanish colonial government felt the need to justify the presence of those who would fill the upper echelons of power. The possession of literacy was one of the symbols that signified access to power. The educational system that the friars established served as a gateway to power in the colony of New Spain. The establishment of an entire national system of education that served Spain's interests kept the friars very busy.

Some of Spain's colonial interests are now quite apparent. The Church and the State, while usually working together, were at times in disagreement over who should be educated in the new technology of literacy. Those who were educated were almost certainly to end up in the service of Spain. The Church historian of the period, Mendieta, described who was taught and the results of that teaching:

> In all the towns there has been built a school. In the same school, in a room by itself, or in the same one if it is large, reading and writing are taught the children of the important people, after they have learned Christian doctrine, which is the only thing taught to the common people out there on the patio, and having learned this they are dismissed so that they can help their parents in their farming or jobs, although in some places there was some carelessness in making this difference (especially in the small villages, where there are few people) so that all the children were taught without distinction, the sons of the principal persons and of the common people, to read and write in the schools, and from this there follows that in these towns the common people rule and command over the plebians, having been elected to these offices by being the most capable and sufficient. (1945, p. 70, v. 3)

The children of the Indian nobles were the first to be sought out and taught because they were the ones who would run the machinery of government. In those towns where space would permit and perhaps where more persons were required to run the bureaucracy, the children of the commoners were also educated. It is clear from Mendieta's report that the children were not educated simply so that they

could know the joys of literacy but so that they could be the foundation of a new society. García Icazbalceta (1896) pointed out that the more gifted students were distinguished form the slower pupils, presumably in a sort of merit ordered system of education. Mendieta recounted how at first the Indian nobles were reluctant to send their children to the friar's schools. Instead, they sent their servants' children until they became aware that these formerly peasant children were graduating and being given positions of authority in the new social order. Zepeda Rincón noted that it was official Spanish policy that all children of the native rulers be handed over to the friars so that they would learn "reading and writing, the Spanish language and Christian doctrine."

Spanish Language Policy

Although the Aztecs had begun a policy of promoting Nahuatl as the official language of their empire, the Spanish failed to continue this policy or to replace Nahuatl with the Castilian tongue (Heath, 1972). The early Spanish settlers (encomenderos) of the new world were given the task of teaching Spanish to the Indians under their jurisdiction. Isabella and Charles V had insisted that they be the agents of Castilianization. Language, however, then as now, was used to maintain social divisions. The settlers did not wish to grant the Indians any more privileges than they had to. Seeing this response on the part of the settlers, Charles V gave the job of language instruction to the friars.

The friars resisted Castilianizing the natives for different reasons than those claimed by the settlers. They saw their primary duty as one of evangelization, not language instruction, and believed that teaching Spanish would tie up their time as well as monopolize scarce resources of teaching talent (Heath, 1972). The friars reasoned that Nahuatl could be more easily taught and spread than Spanish. In 1570, Philip II sided with them and declared the Aztec language the official tongue of the Indians.

Spanish royal support for the official use of the Indian languages can be found in the rulings of Philip III and Philip IV. While Nahuatl was spread somewhat because of Imperial Spanish language policies, it was clearly no longer the language of prestige in New Spain. Spanish was the language of government and of the new European elite in Mexico. But the teaching of Spanish, like Latin, was opposed on the grounds that it upset the social structure that only grudgingly accepted Indians as human beings (Heath, 1972).

In a letter written to Philip II, Gante, who asked for royal support for education, reminded the king that from the schools "go forth the judges of the towns, the mayors, the regidores, those who assist the friars, those who teach others the catechism, and those who help me in the things it is deemed expedient to them" (Steck, 1943). Steck summarized the activity of the Spanish school system in the New World by stating "it was the elementary school universally introduced and wisely organized that contributed immensely to making the Indians what Spain wanted then to be--contented, peaceful, law abiding, and useful citizens." Steck also stated that now the Indians were no longer "enslaved and illiterate," because now they could read books that enlightened and comforted them and they could present their grievances in writing to the authorities and even write to each other.

The early colonial period lasted form 1521 to approximately 1600. Around 1600, the educational system went into a decline. Parkes (1969) writes that the educational labors of the friars "were unpopular among Spanish colonists, who did not wish to see Indians become their equals." As early as 1541, the consejero Jerónimo López is quoted as saying:

> They took many boys in order to teach them doctrine in the monasteries, later they wanted to show them how to read and write: and by their ability, which is great, and by that which the devil wanted to connive there, they learned letters well enough to write books, to engrave, and letters of such different forms that it is a marvel to see them, and there are so many and such great scribes, that I cannot count them all, by way of their letters they know everything that is going on in the world from one ocean to the other easily that which could not have been before. (García Icazbalceta, 1971, p. 149-150)

López was amazed at how quickly the Indians learned and at the extent of their knowledge about the world. Perhaps his amazement is due to the fact that literacy was so restricted in Europe at the time. At any rate, López recognized that in Europe those who were literate occupied positions of authority. What López was not aware of was that restrictions on the spread of literacy, while powerful, were not the only means of maintaining a Spanish monopoly on power. As far as the Spaniards were concerned,

the Indians would always be Indians no matter what their educational accomplishments. So, even if the Indians were fully literate, the new society that Spain had set up would only allow them to advance so far and no farther. However the accoutrements of culture, literacy in Spanish and especially Latin, threatened those who had no intention of ever allowing the Indians full and equal participation in the colonial society (Heath, 1972).

López's complaint about the education being given to the Indians hinges on the teaching of Latin and Spanish. Knowledge of Latin especially was a form of cultural capital reserved for the rulers and elites of European culture (Heath, 1972).

The opposition to Indian education continued, however, not only in the area of literacy but also in the mechanical and industrial arts (Steck, 1943). The Spanish colonists wished to maintain whatever monopolies they could for as long as possible. The support that Indian education received from the government in Spain dwindled as new rulers came into power. In 1580 there was a change in viceroys in Mexico. From about this time on, decadence began creeping in to the educational system. Steck felt that "the enthusiasm and generosity of the pioneer years had waned considerably." Philip II of Spain has received much of the blame not only for the decline in education but also for the ruin of the Spanish empire as a whole. Steck claimed that the colonial policy of Philip II was almost the opposite of what it had been under Charles V. This is an overstatement, but it points out the change in direction Spanish policy took with Philip II. Reaction, in the form of the Inquisition, rid Spain of all Protestants, Jews, and other foreign elements that could have kept Spain academically and economically vital.

There were those who felt that education of the Indians was a waste of time and that the resources used for its furtherance would be better employed by applying them to the education of Spaniards (Mendieta, 1596). In this way the process of decline continued. Fewer and fewer resources were available for teaching the native populations, and there was more and more opposition to the whole idea of native education. The situation is not unlike that found in many "modern" nations where opposition to programs designed for minority groups is often strong. The period of stagnation lasted for at least 200 years, from approximately 1600 until 1800. This stagnation can be seen by comparing Gante's cartilla with the *Cartilla ó Silabario*, which was still being used in the 19th century. It has already been pointed out that this *Cartilla ó Silabario* had been in use since the 16th Century (Tanck Estrada, 1977). Gante's cartilla differed only slightly from it.

In summary then, alphabetic literacy was introduced in Mexico with the coming of the Franciscan friars. The friars introduced many innovations and heartily set about the task of education. Some of the innovations of the friars included the use of the Indians' hieroglyphic picture writing and transcribing the Nahuatl language into Roman letters. Gante wrote a trilingual primer and thus pioneered the use of vernacular language in education. The teaching and learning of reading and writing seems to have flourished under these conditions. Later, the teaching of literacy became fossilized in an unchanging text that was used almost exclusively with only minor changes for two centuries. Literacy always had a definite purpose in Mexico. That purpose was to perpetuate the system of government in power and to convert the native population to Catholicism. The decline of education in Mexico can be accounted for by opposition to indigenous education from Spanish colonists and the cutting off of adequate funding for education.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Facsimile reproduction of Gante's catechism in picture writing. Reprinted from: Navarro, F. (1970). *Catecismo de la doctrina cristriana.* Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia.

Figure 2. Reprinted from: *Codice Osuna* (1947). Mexico DF: Ediciones del Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, p. 196.

Figure 3. Reprinted with permission of Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Taken from: Gante, P. (1569). *Cartilla para enseñar a leer.* Mexico: Pedro de Ocharte.

Figure 4. Reprinted from: Valadés, D. (1579). *Rhetorica Christiana ad cancionandi et orandi usum accomodata utriiusque facultatis exemplis suo loco insertis: quae quidem, ex indorum maxime de prompta sunt historiis, unde practor doctrinam, summa quoque delectatio comparabitur.* Pérouse.

Figure 1

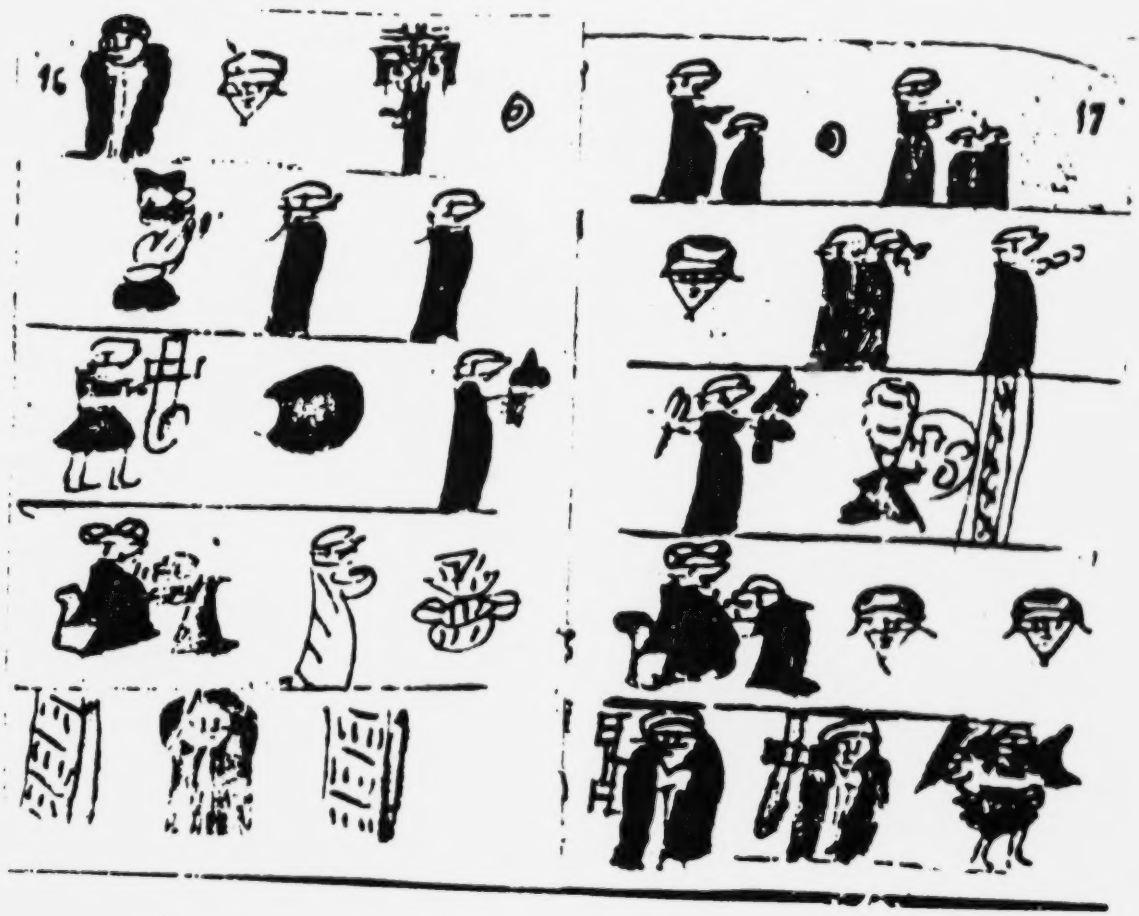

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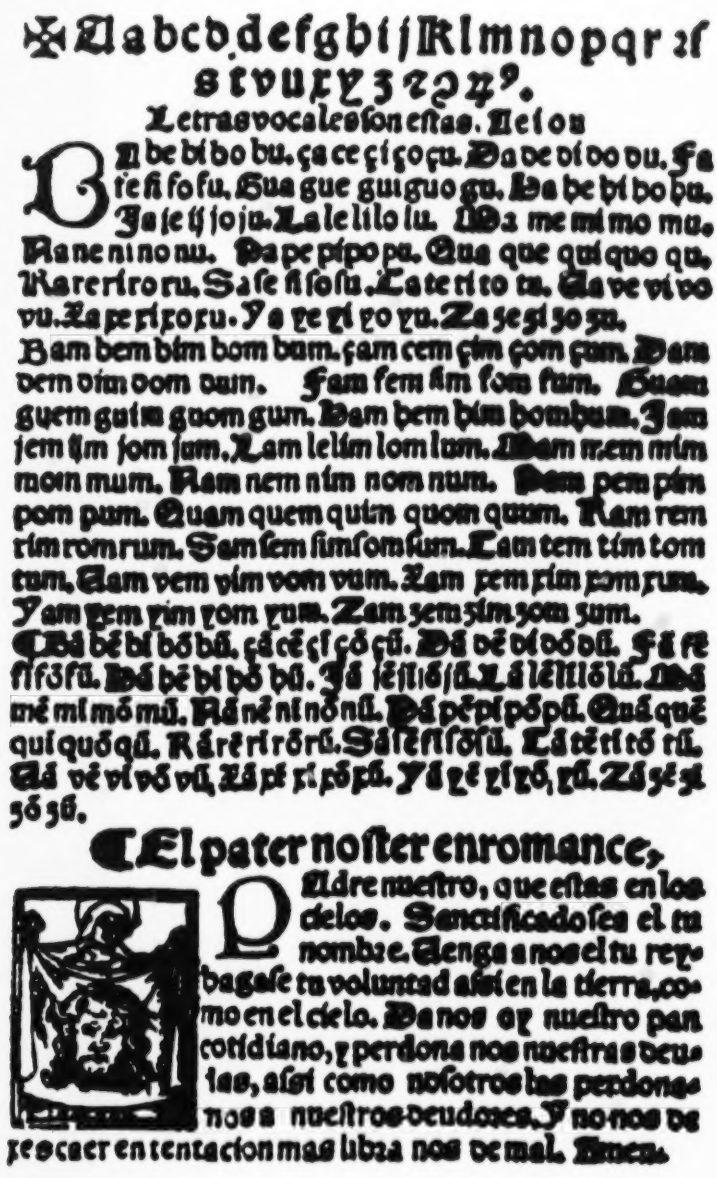
Figure 2

Figure 3

Cartilla para enseñar a leer, nueuamente enmenda-
da, y quitadas todas las abreuiaturas que antes tenía.
A a b c o d e f g h i k l m n
o p q r z ſ ſt v u x y z t c ꝯ ⁹

Figure 3 (cont.)



✠ Aabcdefghijklmnopqrſ
stvuxyzçȝ9.

Letras vocales son estas. A e i o u

Ba be bi bo bu. ça ce çi ço çu. Da de di do du. Fa fe fi fo fu. Gua gue gui guo gu. Ha he hi ho hu. Ja je ij jo ju. La le lil lo lu. Ma me mi mo mu. Na ne ni no nu. Pa pe pi po pu. Qua que qui quo qu. Rare rir o ru. Saſe ſi ſoſu. Ta te ti to tu. Va ve vi vo vu. Xa xe xi xo xu. Ya ye yi yo yu. Za ze zi zo zu.

Bam bem bim bom bum. çam cem çim çom çum. Dam dem dim dom dum. Fam fem fim fom fum. Guam guem guim guom gum. Ham hem him homhum. Jam jem jm jom jum. Lam lelim lom lum. Mam mem mim moin mum. Nam nem nim nom num. Pam pem pim pom pum. Quam quem quim quom quum. Ram rem rim rom rum. Sam ſem ſim ſom ſum. Tam tem tim tom tum. Vam vem vim vom vum. Xam xem xim xom xum. Yam yem yim yom yum. Zam zem zim zom zum.

Cbā bē bi bō bū. çā cē çi çō çū. Dā dē di dō dū. Fā fe fi fō fū. Hā hē hi hō hū. Jā jē jī jō jū. Lā lē lī lō lū. Mā mē mi mō mū. Nā nē ni nō nū. Pā pē pi pō pū. Quā quē qui quō qū. Rā rē ri rō rū. Sā ſē ſi ſō ſū. Tā tē ti tō tū. Vā vē vi vō vū. Xā xi xi xō xū. Yā yē yi yō yū. Zā zē zi zō zū.

El pater noſter en romance,

Padre nuestro, que estas en los cielos. Sanctificado ſea el tu nombre. Venga a nos el tu reyno. Sea ſe tu voluntad aſsi en la tierra, como en el cielo. Da nos oy nuestro pan cotidiano, y perdona nos nuestras deudas, aſsi como nosotros las perdonamos a nuestros deudores. Y no nos dexes caer en tentacion mas libra nos de mal. Amen.

Figure 3 (cont.)

El pater noster en latín.

Pater noster, qui es in cels. Sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adueniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in celo & in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie. Et dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut & nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. Et ne nos inducas in temptationem. Sed libera nos a malo. Amen

Y aquí comiença en Pater noster.

Otetzine yn ilhuicactimoetz tica: macenquizca yectenehua lo ynmotocayoan. Mahuelauh yn motlatoca yoyan, mactimalo ynilaltipac yn tlalticpac yn tlamonequiltia, & ninub chiualo ynilhuicac: mano yub chiualo inmican ynilaltipac. Ihab ynacan mayitechmomaquilli yn totlatlacol yninub tiquimpopolhuia ynitechtlatlacalhuia. Macamoyitech motlalcahuilli ynic amo ypantiuetziyoque ynilatlacolli: mayitechmomaquiltili ynihuicpa yn amo qualli. Ma ynmochiua. Amen.

El Aue maria en romance.

Aue te salue maria, llena de gracia, el señor es contigo. Bendita tu entre las mugeres. Y bendito el fructo de tu vientre Jesus. Sancta maria virgen madre de dios ruega por nosotros pecadores. Amen.

a ij

Figure 4

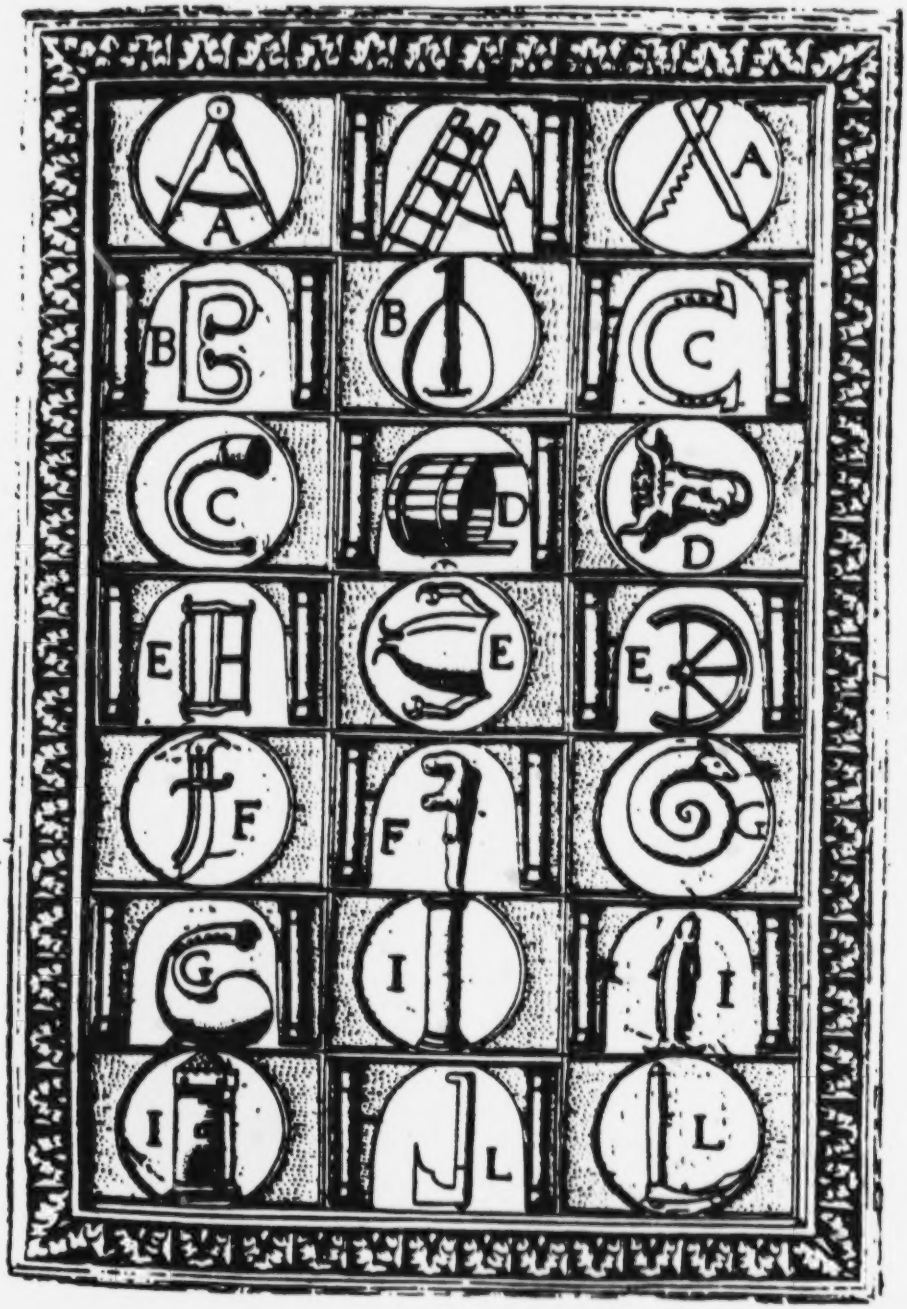


Figure 4 (cont.)

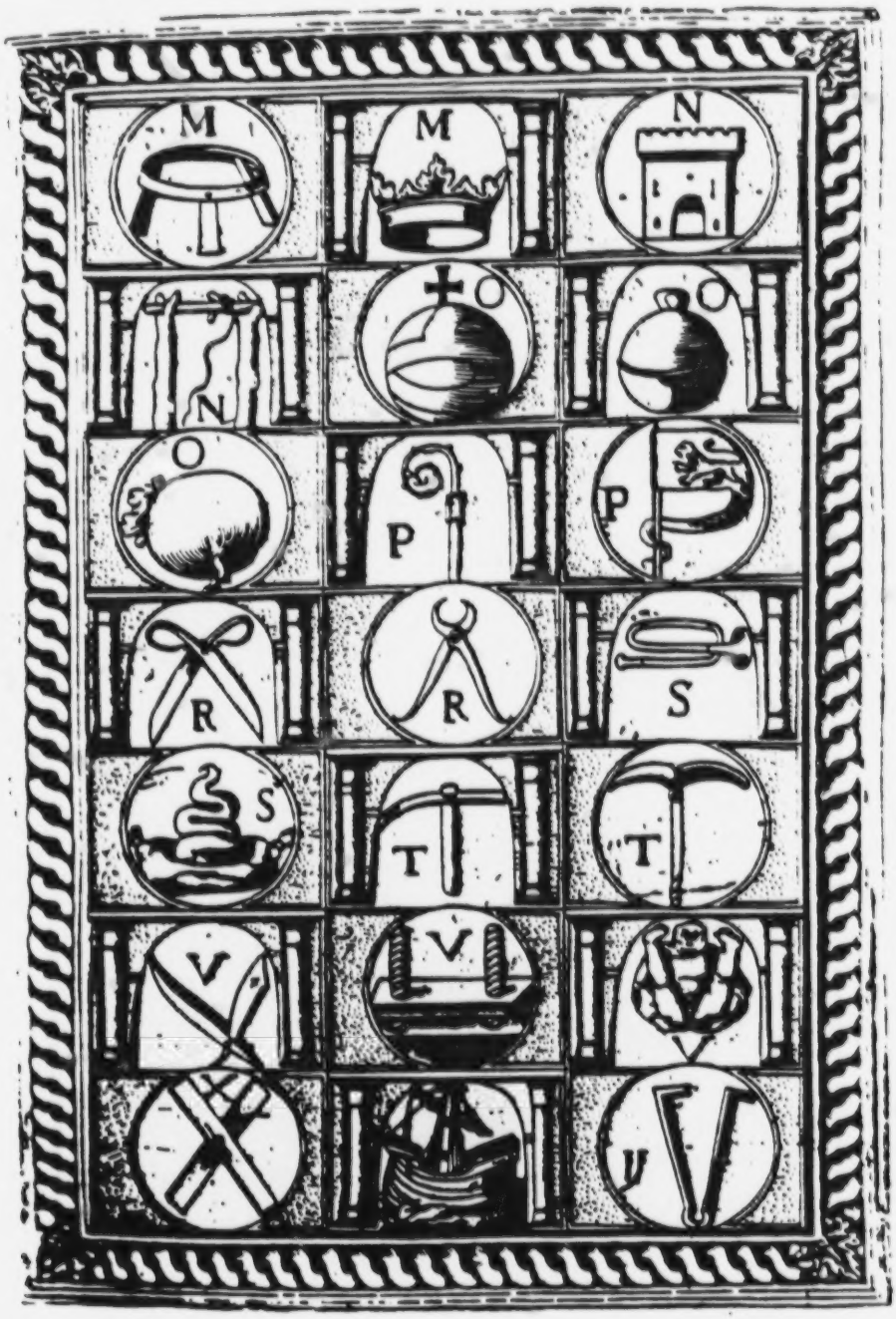


Figure 4 (cont.)